



EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE

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news digest

96-1467D

Court dismisses charges against Bishop Walter Righter over ordination of homosexual

(ENS) A controversial legal process that threw an international spotlight on the Episcopal Church's struggles over the place of homosexuals in the ordained ministry came to an apparent conclusion May 15 as an ecclesiastical court ruled that retired Bishop Walter Righter violated no church law or "core doctrine" when he ordained a non-celibate homosexual man as a deacon.

Because Righter signed a statement supporting the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals and ordained the Rev. Barry Stopfel, now rector of St. George's in Maplewood, New Jersey, as a deacon in 1990, 10 bishops charged him in January, 1995, with "holding and teaching . . . doctrine contrary to that held by this church" under the so-called "heresy" canon, and with violating his ordination vows.

A seven-to-one majority of the bishops sitting on the Court for the Trial of a Bishop ruled, however, that there is "no core doctrine prohibiting the ordination of a non-celibate, homosexual person living in a faithful and committed sexual relationship with a person of the same sex." Likewise, the court stated that it did not find "sufficient clarity in the church's teaching at the present time concerning the morality of same sex relationships" to support the charge that Righter violated his ordination vow to uphold the discipline of the church.

At several points in the decision, read before a hushed and attentive audience of nearly 200 in the sanctuary of the Cathedral Church of St. John in Wilmington, Delaware, the bishops made it clear that they were throwing the issue back to General Convention, the Episcopal Church's chief legislative body.

At issue in the case was exactly what church doctrine is protected by the church's canons on clergy discipline, the court stated, as the bishops in the majority took turns reading sections of a summary of their 27-page decision. The majority ruled that only "core doctrine" relating to the central salvation event of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is automatically protected by the canon on teaching false

doctrine.

The court was also clear in limiting the scope of its decision. "We are not deciding whether life-long, committed, same gender sexual relationships are or are not a wholesome example with respect to ordination vows," the court stated. "We are not rendering an opinion on whether a bishop and diocese should or should not ordain persons living in same gender sexual relationships. Rather, we are deciding the narrow issue of whether or not under Title IV a bishop is restrained from ordaining persons living in committed same gender sexual relationships."

96-1468D

Service celebrates decision dismissing heresy charges against Bishop Righter

(ENS) A regularly scheduled confirmation service at St. George's Church in Maplewood, New Jersey, the afternoon of May 19, was turned at short notice into a diocesan-wide affirmation of an ecclesial court's decision the previous week that could mean the end of a case against Bishop Walter Righter.

On behalf of Bishop John Spong of the Diocese of Newark, Righter ordained the Rev. Barry Stopfel, a non-celibate homosexual who is now rector of St. George's, as a deacon in 1990. Five years later, a presentment or ecclesiastical accusation brought by 10 other bishops charged Righter with violating the doctrine of the church and his own ordination vows.

On May 15, meeting in Wilmington, Delaware, the Episcopal Court for the Trial of a Bishop announced that it had dismissed the charges against Righter, having found no prohibition in either church discipline or "core doctrine" against such ordinations.

The court was clear that it was not establishing policy for the Episcopal Church, referring the matter to General Convention, the chief legislative body of the Episcopal Church, and at the time of the service the bishops who brought the original presentment had not yet announced whether they would appeal. But in a diocese long associated--negatively by many--with its bishop's radical statements on behalf of homosexual rights, and in a congregation that felt that the charges against Righter were attacks against one of their own, the day had come to celebrate.

Nearly 250 members of St. George's and other parishes packed the church for the two-hour service, their high spirits barely dampened by the sweltering weather. In a sermon interrupted repeatedly by applause, laughter and several standing ovations, Spong lifted up the congregations, Stopfel and his partner, the Rev. Will Leckie, as well as Righter and his wife, Nancy, who attended as guests of honor.

96-1469D

Bishop Chalfant resigns as bishop of Maine

(ENS) The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Maine announced May 10 that Bishop Edward Chalfant has resigned, effective May 6.

The resignation comes in the wake of an April 16 revelation that the bishop had been involved in an extra-marital relationship with "an unmarried adult lay woman" who was not employed by the diocese.

In announcing initially that he would take a voluntary leave of absence, Chalfant said, "I recognize that my behavior constitutes a betrayal the trust placed in me by the church, the diocese, and my family, and I deeply regret this betrayal." He said that he would seek therapy and held open the possibility of reconciliation with the diocese.

In his May 6 resignation letter, however, Chalfant concluded that "the diocese has complicated work to do in order to proceed with its mission and ministry. I do not want to impede that work by creating non-essential and peripheral concerns of conjecture about my possible return following my leave-of-absence."

After reviewing and evaluating the facts in the case, and consulting with Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, the Standing Committee concluded that Chalfant should resign. The Standing Committee will serve as the ecclesiastical authority while seeking interim episcopal oversight.

A diocesan convention on May 17 was scheduled to reflect on the next steps for diocesan life and leadership.

96-1470D

Seattle dean blesses relationship of gay couple

(ENS) The two gay men who sought a blessing for their relationship in the fall of 1994, and were blocked by the bishop, stood before the altar at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, May 19, surrounded by hundreds of friends and parishioners who gathered to express their support.

Citing his responsibility to respond to a pastoral situation, Dean Frederick Northup said in a letter to Bishop Vincent Warner, Jr., that "nothing could be more natural than for us to gather as a community to thank God for their 11 years together and to ask God's continued blessing on their future."

As Dr. James Black and Thomas Monnahan exchanged vows and rings and knelt, Northup said, "Let their love be without shame, a sign of a new world of justice and peace."

Bishop Vincent Warner, Jr., stopped the blessing in 1994 because he said that the bishops had agreed to "stay in community with each other" and not move until the

church as a whole makes a decision on the issue.

In a letter to the diocese, Warner said that a clarification at a House of Bishops meeting in 1995 observed that permission was "not in the hands of anyone to give or withhold." And he said that "permission for this blessing was neither sought, nor given." Until the church makes a decision and resolves what it called a "discontinuity" between the church's teaching and the experience of some of its members, clergy may "respond pastorally to those persons whose sexual behavior does not conform to the traditional standards and norms of the church."

Warner also pointed out that the blessing "is not a statement on behalf of the bishop, nor was it St. Mark's acting as a cathedral, the seat of the bishop. It was St. Mark's Parish responding, in love, to the two men whose committed relationship was celebrated."

96-1471D

Religious campaign on refugee issues gains strength from Congressional lobbying efforts

(ENS) Concerted effort by religious groups concerned with immigration and refugee issues helped curb some of the most harmful excesses of recent Congressional bills on immigration, reported Richard Parkins, director of Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). But perhaps equally important, their successes gave them renewed faith in their own voices, he said.

Parkins said he was buoyed by "the affirmation which our church networks have received in knowing that their voice counts. This means that an ability exists to speak ever more powerfully for refugees and immigrants."

As part of the Campaign for Refugee Protection, EMM helped push for changes in bills before both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and "our advocacy has been enormously successful," Parkins said. "It is generally acknowledged that the voice of the churches has been heard on many of the key issues."

The campaign counted as victories the elimination of a cap that would have drastically reduced the number of refugees allowed into the United States, the preservation of categories giving preference to family members of immigrants already in the United States, and the preservation of asylum rights for refugees who lack appropriate documentation. Yet lobbying efforts were not able to stop the sharp reduction in benefits available to legal immigrants.

96-1472D

Russian Orthodox patriarch blesses cooperation on ministry with the military

(ENS) During a meeting April 21 in Moscow, Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia blessed the emerging cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Episcopal Church as the Russians seek to restore their military chaplaincy.

The Episcopal Church's Bishop for the Armed Forces Charles Keyser led a delegation of military chaplains to consult with the Russian Orthodox last summer. At that time, the patriarch said that he planned to appoint a new bishop to oversee military chaplaincy.

In introducing Bishop Savva, the patriarch pointed out that he was a soldier before becoming a monk and priest. The patriarch added that he was convinced that the new bishop could benefit from the experience of the Episcopal Church's chaplaincy and learn from how its ministry is organized.

"We have much to learn," the patriarch said during the visit last summer. "You have proven in practice already that you are committed to help us.... In many ways, we are beginning from scratch. We must share with those churches which have a long experience."

The patriarch thanked Keyser and his party for the long-standing relationship between the two churches, giving special thanks to the social ministry which is now serving as a witness and model for the Orthodox as they attempt to reestablish their own ministries in the wake of the collapse of communism.

In response, Keyser brought greetings from Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and expressed his thanks for the consecration of Bishop Savva. He spoke of his hopes for their work together in the future. With Browning's approval and support, Keyser invited Savva and his staff to visit Episcopal military and prison chaplains in the United States and to accompany him on a visit to Russian and American soldiers serving together on the peace-keeping mission in Bosnia. The patriarch endorsed the idea and agreed to support the trip to Bosnia.

96-1473D

Browning joins in supporting Clinton's veto of "partial birth abortion" ban

(ENS) Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning has joined other mainstream religious leaders in urging Congress not to override President Bill Clinton's veto of the so-called "partial birth abortion ban" that would outlaw a rare but controversial late-term abortion procedure.

The April 29 letter to members of Congress, sponsored by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, states that the signers "fully support the President's action in standing with women and their families who face tragic, untenable pregnancies."

The coalition includes offices and agencies of the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, and United Church of Christ, as well as Reform and Conservative Jewish faith groups. The nearly 30 signers of the letter include the Rev. James Andrews, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Paul Sherry, president of the United Church of Christ, Thomas White Wolf Fassett, executive secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, and Rabbi Alex Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The coalition also wrote to Clinton expressing its support of his veto. "We know that some religious leaders have criticized you for that veto based on their sincere religious beliefs that human life is sacred," the letter states. "You should know that we, too, hold human life sacred, yet we respectfully disagree with this legislation."

The legislation passed by Congress and vetoed by Clinton would outlaw the "intact dilation and extraction" method of abortion, referred to as "partial birth abortion" by abortion opponents.

96-1474D

South African Truth Commission staggers under weight of horrifying testimony

(ENS) As the parade of witnesses told their harrowing stories of torture and death to the opening sessions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, bowed his head and wept openly. Staggering under the weight of the testimony, he was not even able to adjourn the session. He and other commission members received counseling to help them cope with the accounts emerging from the dark period of apartheid.

Yet observers said that the first week of hearings was marked by the absence of any bitterness or calls for revenge. Witnesses wanted facts, to know who was responsible for the abuses and what had happened to friends and family who disappeared.

A teenager whose politically active father was murdered, told the commission, "We want to forgive--but we don't know whom to forgive." Several witnesses said that forgiveness would be possible only if the guilty came forward, confessed their guilt and repented.

"Few of us can be the same again," Tutu said after one round of testimonies. In response to a white Afrikaner who lost an eight-year-old son in an attack by soldiers of the African National Congress (ANC), the archbishop said, "The reason why we still hope that reconciliation will triumph is because of people like you."

Tutu told another witness, "You are an example of why we are going to make it in this country. The reason why we won the struggle was not because of guns, but because we had people like you--people of incredible strength. Thank you for sacrificing your husbands."

96-1475D

Conference in Dallas addresses issues of the church as workplace

(ENS) A butcher, a baker, a candle-stick maker or a deacon, an organist or a secretary: What constitutes work in the Episcopal Church and how is it valued?

These questions highlighted a three-day conference on *Strengthening Working Relationships in the Church*, organized by the Professional Ministry Development Cluster of the Episcopal Church and held May 2-4 in Dallas, Texas.

Prompted by rising anxiety over job-related issues expressed by the National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations (NNECA), the National Network of Lay Professionals (NNLP), and the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning issued a call for the meeting to assess how people who work for the church feel about their work.

Twenty-two persons in leadership roles from a variety of professional and vocational associations throughout the Episcopal Church gathered to compare notes from the work experience of their members. The groups' wide diversity and a floodtide of vocational insecurities had the potential to override any common purpose. The result, however, was a spirit of remarkable unity and focus.

Out of the conference was born a new professional association called the Colloquium of Episcopal Professional and Vocational Associations (CEPVA) which will continue to address the issues that face those who work for the church.

96-1467

Court dismisses charges against Bishop Walter Righter over ordination of homosexual

by James H. Thrall

(ENS) A controversial legal process that threw an international spotlight on the Episcopal Church's struggles over the place of homosexuals in the ordained ministry came to an apparent conclusion May 15 as an ecclesiastical court ruled that retired Bishop Walter Righter violated no church law or "core doctrine" when he ordained a non-celibate homosexual man as a deacon.

Because Righter signed a statement supporting the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals and ordained the Rev. Barry Stopfel, now rector of St. George's in Maplewood, New Jersey, as a deacon in 1990, 10 bishops charged him in January, 1995, with "holding and teaching . . . doctrine contrary to that held by this church" under the so-called "heresy" canon, and with violating his ordination vows.

A seven-to-one majority of the bishops sitting on the Court for the Trial of a Bishop ruled, however, that there is "no core doctrine prohibiting the ordination of a non-celibate, homosexual person living in a faithful and committed sexual relationship with a person of the same sex." Likewise, the court stated that it did not find "sufficient clarity in the church's teaching at the present time concerning the morality of same sex relationships" to support the charge that Righter violated his ordination vow to uphold the discipline of the church.

At several points in the decision, read before a hushed and attentive audience of nearly 200 in the sanctuary of the Cathedral Church of St. John in Wilmington, Delaware, the bishops made it clear that they were throwing the issue back to General Convention, the Episcopal Church's chief legislative body.

And the court took pains to address what they called the pastoral concerns related to their decision, calling for "mutual respect and understanding" by those holding different opinions. It urged other Christian communions--many of whom face the same difficult issue--to realize that the decision was not establishing policy for the church.

What is core doctrine?

At issue in the case was exactly what church doctrine is protected by the church's canons on clergy discipline, the court stated, as the bishops in the majority took turns reading sections of a summary of their 27-page decision. The majority ruled that only "core doctrine" relating to the central salvation event of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is automatically protected by the canon on teaching false doctrine. While other church teachings might be enforceable under the canon, that

protection has to be specifically spelled out, the majority stated.

Without clear General Convention action one way or the other, the court indicated that "this issue will not be resolved and the church unified in its faith and practice by presentments and trials, nor by unilateral acts of bishops and their dioceses, or through the adoption of proclamations by groups of bishops or others expressing positions on the issues."

The court was also clear in limiting the scope of its decision. "We are not deciding whether life-long, committed, same gender sexual relationships are or are not a wholesome example with respect to ordination vows," the court stated. "We are not rendering an opinion on whether a bishop and diocese should or should not ordain persons living in same gender sexual relationships. Rather, we are deciding the narrow issue of whether or not under Title IV a bishop is restrained from ordaining persons living in committed same gender sexual relationships."

Signing the majority opinion were Bishops Edward W. Jones of Indianapolis, the court's president; Robert C. Johnson of North Carolina; Donis D. Patterson, retired bishop of Dallas; Cabell Tennis of Delaware; Douglas E. Theuner of New Hampshire; Arthur E. Walmsley, retired bishop of Connecticut; and Roger J. White of Milwaukee.

Threat to church unity?

In a dissenting opinion, Bishop Andrew Fairfield of North Dakota argued for a broader interpretation of doctrine, maintaining that a 1979 statement of the General Convention calling ordination of non-celibate homosexuals "not appropriate" embodied authoritative doctrine. The majority interpreted that resolution as only a recommendation.

"The bottom line is," Fairfield argued following a review of biblical verses with apparent references to homosexuality, "any homosexual activity of any kind is proscribed."

Two other bishops of the court--Roger White and Donis Patterson--concurred with the majority, but stressed in a separate opinion that ordination of non-celibate homosexuals is not therefore permissible because it is not supported by scripture, the corporate decision of the church or the Book of Common Prayer. For bishops to act without that authority is to "preempt the corporately discerned and fixed teaching of the church," and to "threaten the unity of the church," White said.

A ninth bishop, Frederick Borsch of Los Angeles, withdrew from the court after his impartiality was challenged by the presenting bishops following the ordination of a non-celibate homosexual in his diocese after the court held its first hearing.

Decision brings celebration and dismay

With obvious relief following the conclusion of the two-hour session, a jubilant Righter called the 16-month legal ordeal "invasive," saying that "it's invaded my life, my wife's life and the lives of my kids." Righter performed the ordination of Stopfel while serving as assistant bishop in Newark following his retirement as bishop of Iowa. He now lives with his wife, Nancy, in New Hampshire.

Righter said that, while the decision may encourage some bishops to ordain non-celibate homosexuals, other bishops considering such ordinations may wait for the actions of the next General Convention, meeting in Philadelphia in July, 1997.

His attorney, Michael Rehill, maintained that the decision cleared the way for other ordinations of non-celibate homosexuals without establishing it as the policy of the Episcopal Church. "What the court said today is, there is no restraint on the right and power of a bishop to ordain" non-celibate homosexuals, he said. "It's not saying it's OK; it's saying it's not illegal."

Stopfel, who attended the two-hour court session with his partner, the Rev. Will Leckie, a United Church of Christ minister, said, "I feel very proud of my church today," suggesting that the ruling will "let the people of this church continue to work on their understanding of human sexuality."

As one of the court bishops noted, Stopfel said, "We should not be taking each other to court, we should be taking each other to God in prayer. So we've closed the avenue on something adversarial and now we can spend more time developing relationships and dialogue."

Disappointed, but not surprised

The celebration of Righter and his supporters, who were gathered in first few rows of pews on the left side of cathedral as the decision was read, was matched by clear disappointment on the part of Church Advocate A. Hugo Blankingship and those who supported the presentment, seated on the right.

Only two of the bishops who brought the original charge or "presentment"--John Howe of Central Florida and James Stanton of Dallas--attended the session. They made little comment before leaving the cathedral immediately after the session's close, choosing not to attend a scheduled press conference. Saying they were disappointed but not surprised with the ruling, Howe said no decision had been made on whether an appeal would be filed. The presenting bishops may appeal the decision on the first count on teaching false doctrine to a second court within 30 days. Should that second court reverse the first, Righter could still face ecclesiastical punishment.

In a statement released the following day, the 10 presenting bishops called the decision "stunning" though predictable. "In a single pronouncement it has swept away two millennia of Christian teaching regarding God's purposes in creation, the nature and meaning of marriage and the family," the statement claimed. The decision also

jeopardizes efforts to strengthen ecumenical relations with other communions, such as the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans, it said.

Raising what they called the "hard and inescapable question" of "where do we go from here?" the presenting bishops announced that they would hold a press conference in Dallas, May 28, to give their answer.

Early reaction is mixed

Organizations and individuals throughout the church were quick to either hail or condemn the announcement.

"By disregarding the church's doctrine of marriage, this court has condemned the Episcopal Church to still more anarchy and conflict," warned the Rev. Todd H. Wetzel, executive director of Episcopalians United, a conservative organization opposed to what it perceives as the liberal trends of the church. "This ruling is a tacit validation of homosexuality," he said. "Both Holy Scripture and The Book of Common Prayer clearly teach the doctrine that Christians are to reserve sexual intimacy for the sacrament of marriage. The practice of homosexuality is a flagrant violation of long-held Christian belief."

He cautioned that "Episcopalians will remember this ruling when they choose where to devote their energies and their finances. With this ruling the Episcopal Church as a national entity will continue to fragment and devolve."

A spokesman for the Episcopal Synod of America, an organization of traditionalist Episcopalians, stated that it would not recognize the court's decision and warned of schism. The synod, said the Rev. Samuel Edwards, executive director, "takes seriously the Bible's requirement that we separate ourselves from those who deny the Gospel."

On the other hand, the national board of Integrity, an organization which supports gay and lesbian Episcopalians, called for "mutual reconciliation and healing," and said that "the church is now in a position to fully embrace the ministry of its lesbian and gay clergy." Integrity hopes that "the decision will aid in evangelism by our church, not only in the lesbian and gay community, but in the broader community as well, especially among the young, who long to see a loving church reaching out to their complex world."

Decision seen to underscore inclusiveness

Bishop Otis Charles, the only openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church and former dean of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, praised the court's action, saying, "The dismissal of heresy charges against Bishop Walter Righter lifts the spirits of thousands of gay and lesbian Episcopalians." He contended that the decision "unequivocally upholds a growing awareness that a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach has no more place in the church than in the military."

Drawing a parallel between the struggles over homosexual ordination and ordination of women, a statement from the Episcopal Women's Caucus said, "We especially rejoice with our lesbian sisters and gay brothers in this affirmation of the gift of their ministries in our church." The caucus "gives thanks that the church is not now compelled to drive out large numbers of faithful and effective clergy who are lesbian and gay along with the bishops who ordained them," the statement noted, adding that "God calls human beings to God's service, and the church ordains human beings, not categories."

Browning and Chinnis respond

Bishop Frank Griswold of Chicago cautioned against interpreting the court's actions as "a victory in as much as the question of homosexuality in the life of the church is a question that is far from being resolved." It continues to be "extremely important ... to listen with care and respect to the various voices which continue to be a part of the process of debate and discernment."

Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning praised the court for its "thoughtful and thorough" work, and, like Griswold, stressed that "we will all be diminished if this action is thought of in terms of winners and losers." The whole church will be blessed, he said, "if we see this as another significant step on a difficult path of discernment. The court has shown the world an Anglican way of seeking a common mind."

He also noted that "to our great credit, our church does not hesitate to deal openly and responsibly together on the difficult issues of our common life, of which sexuality is one."

Pamela P. Chinnis, president of the General Convention's House of Deputies, underscored the court's message that "our General Convention is responsible for resolving issues of this sort." No other group, "not a court, or the House of Bishops or the House of Deputies acting separately, or any group of individual bishops, clergy or laity, has authority to impose a decision on the rest of the church."

Echoing the court's warning that "devoted members of the church have deeply held convictions about this particular issue which lead to contradictory practices," Chinnis cautioned that "not even legislative resolution at some future date will automatically result in consensus."

The church's structure "protects the fundamental unity of the church in periods of conflict," she added. "It has held us together for two decades despite profound disagreements and conflicting practices about the ordination of women. I trust God will continue to help us maintain that unity now."

The crucial unity to seek now is to "be of one heart" rather than of "one mind," argued Bishop James Jelinek of Minnesota. "When God gives us the gift to be of one heart, we can agree and disagree, we can fight and argue, we can do all sorts

of things without causing even deeper wounds in our passion for truth and justice."

--James H. Thrall is deputy director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1468

Service celebrates decision dismissing heresy charges against Bishop Righter

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The court was clear that it was not establishing policy for the Episcopal Church, referring the matter to General Convention, the chief legislative body of the Episcopal Church, and at the time of the service the bishops who brought the original presentment had not yet announced whether they would appeal. But in a diocese long associated--negatively by many--with its bishop's radical statements on behalf of homosexual rights, and in a congregation that felt that the charges against Righter were attacks against one of their own, the day had come to celebrate.

A witness to inclusive love

Nearly 250 members of St. George's and other parishes packed the church for the two-hour service, their high spirits barely dampened by the sweltering weather. In a sermon interrupted repeatedly by applause, laughter and several standing ovations, Spong praised the congregations, Stopfel and his partner, the Rev. Will Leckie, as

well as Righter and his wife, Nancy, who attended as guests of honor.

He also highlighted the role his diocese has played in the Episcopal Church's debate over human sexuality.

"I want to bid you to rejoice, but not at a victory," Spong said. "Rather, I want you to rejoice that the witness to the inclusive love of God that this diocese of Newark has made has now rooted itself in the Christian consciousness of the world in an indelible way."

Noting that "people love to take shots at the Diocese of Newark," and reporting that a conservative religious publication recently called the diocese "an insignificant flyspeck," Spong proclaimed, "Today this insignificant flyspeck has become God's agent in doing nothing less than defining the very nature of the Christian church."

The international media attention to the trial of Bishop Righter should not be seen as "publicity for a victory," he said. "We are news-worthy, we believe, because a church is news-worthy when it dares to live as it speaks. It is news-worthy when the love of God is seen to stop at no human barrier, nor to bend at any human prejudice."

The press coverage "is a testimony to the fact that there is still enormous power to be found inside religious integrity," he said. "This church of ours has done an audacious thing. We will not now tremble at our audacity. Rather we will step boldly into the future that we have helped to build."

Grace and dignity

Spong praised the congregation for its courage in calling Stopfel as its priest three years ago, and in supporting him as he and St. George's became a focal point for media attention during the 17-month legal process. He also thanked Stopfel and Leckie for having endured being "debated across this country and across this world" through "no choice of your own." Calling Stopfel one of the diocese's "most gifted and dedicated clergy," he told Stopfel and Leckie, "I have been inspired by the depth of your commitment to your ministry and your commitment to each other."

He also praised Righter, who celebrated the Eucharist, for responding to the charges against him with "grace and dignity," despite the rude intrusion the case had made on his retirement. "You were neither vindictive nor hostile," Spong said. "'School-yard bullies' was the harshest epithet you hurled at your adversaries."

When the presentment was brought in January, 1995, "you were a retired bishop living in rural New Hampshire with your wife and your memories of a distinguished but not well-known career," Spong said to Righter. "Today you are the best-known bishop of the Anglican Communion in the world."

—James H. Thrall is deputy director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1469

Bishop Chalfant resigns as bishop of Maine

(ENS) The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Maine announced May 10 that Bishop Edward Chalfant has resigned, effective May 6.

The resignation comes in the wake of an April 16 revelation that the bishop had been involved in an extra-marital relationship with "an unmarried adult lay woman" who was not employed by the diocese.

In announcing initially that he would take a voluntary leave of absence, Chalfant said, "I recognize that my behavior constitutes a betrayal the trust placed in me by the church, the diocese, and my family, and I deeply regret this betrayal." He said that he would seek therapy and held open the possibility of reconciliation with the diocese.

In his May 6 resignation letter, however, Chalfant concluded that "the diocese has complicated work to do in order to proceed with its mission and ministry. I do not want to impede that work by creating non-essential and peripheral concerns of conjecture about my possible return following my leave-of-absence."

After reviewing and evaluating the facts in the case, and consulting with Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, the Standing Committee concluded that Chalfant should resign. The Standing Committee will serve as the ecclesiastical authority while seeking interim episcopal oversight.

A diocesan convention on May 17 was scheduled to reflect on the next steps for diocesan life and leadership.

96-1470

Seattle dean blesses relationship of gay couple

by James Solheim

(ENS) The two gay men who sought a blessing for their relationship in the fall of 1994, and were blocked by the bishop, stood before the altar at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, May 19, surrounded by hundreds of friends and parishioners who gathered to express their support.

Citing his responsibility to respond to a pastoral situation, Dean Frederick

Northup said in a letter to Bishop Vincent Warner, Jr., that "nothing could be more natural than for us to gather as a community to thank God for their 11 years together and to ask God's continued blessing on their future."

As Dr. James Black and Thomas Monnahan exchanged vows and rings and knelt, Northup said, "Let their love be without shame, a sign of a new world of justice and peace."

Permission neither sought nor given

Bishop Vincent Warner, Jr., stopped the blessing in 1994 because he said that the bishops had agreed to "stay in community with each other" and not move until the church as a whole makes a decision on the issue.

In a letter to the diocese, Warner said that a clarification at a House of Bishops meeting in 1995 observed that permission was "not in the hands of anyone to give or withhold." And he said that "permission for this blessing was neither sought, nor given." Until the church makes a decision and resolves what it called a "discontinuity" between the church's teaching and the experience of some of its members, clergy may "respond pastorally to those persons whose sexual behavior does not conform to the traditional standards and norms of the church."

Warner also pointed out that the blessing "is not a statement on behalf of the bishop, nor was it St. Mark's acting as a cathedral, the seat of the bishop. It was St. Mark's Parish responding, in love, to the two men whose committed relationship was celebrated.

"Although I would not have chosen to have this union blessed at this time--as the dialogue continues in the church--there is a place for conscience and the prophetic in the Episcopal Church," Warner continued.

Northup acknowledged that "as a church we are in a period of indecision, testing, and searching." He added that the parish has been discussing sexuality for years. "It is because of our long and deep involvement in this area, and because of their knowledge of Thom and Jim, that the vestry voted 13-2 a year and a half ago in support of the blessing of their life together."

Monnahan, who is HIV-positive, said that he and others may not be alive by the time the Episcopal Church reaches consensus on blessing same-sex relationships.

--James Solheim is director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1471

Religious campaign on refugee issues gains strength from Congressional lobbying efforts

by James H. Thrall

(ENS) Concerted effort by religious groups concerned with immigration and refugee issues helped curb some of the most harmful excesses of recent Congressional bills on immigration, reported Richard Parkins, director of Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). But perhaps equally important, their successes gave them renewed faith in their own voices, he said.

Parkins said he was buoyed by "the affirmation which our church networks have received in knowing that their voice counts. This means that an ability exists to speak ever more powerfully for refugees and immigrants."

As part of the Campaign for Refugee Protection, EMM helped push for changes in bills before both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and "our advocacy has been enormously successful," Parkins said. "It is generally acknowledged that the voice of the churches has been heard on many of the key issues."

The campaign counted as victories the elimination of a cap that would have drastically reduced the number of refugees allowed into the United States, the preservation of categories giving preference to family members of immigrants already in the United States, and the preservation of asylum rights for refugees who lack appropriate documentation. Yet lobbying efforts were not able to stop the sharp reduction in benefits available to legal immigrants.

Flawed legislation

"Regrettably, we still have a terribly flawed piece of legislation considering the denial of benefits that taxpaying immigrants will face," Parkins said. "Our satisfaction about the campaign is offset by the realization that in the current climate a more restrictive piece of legislation was about to emerge."

The campaign members, along with other groups, will be continuing their work as the House and Senate bills are merged since some provisions dropped from one bill remain in the other. Chief goals, Parkins said, are making certain that the provisions of the amendment protecting asylum rights are retained, and defeating an amendment that would allow states to bar the children of illegal immigrants from attending school.

The amendment on children "is an item that will be 'conferenced' because it does not appear in the Senate bill," Parkins said. "We do now want the Senate to cede to the House language. We shall make a major effort on this issue as we feel strongly

about any possibility of children being denied schooling."

—James H. Thrall is deputy director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1472

Russian Orthodox patriarch blesses cooperation on ministry with the military

by William C. Noble

(ENS) During a meeting April 21 in Moscow, Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia blessed the emerging cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Episcopal Church as the Russians restore their military chaplaincy.

The Episcopal Church's Bishop for the Armed Forces Charles Keyser led a delegation of military chaplains to consult with the Russian Orthodox last summer. At that time, the patriarch said that he planned to appoint a new bishop to oversee military chaplaincy.

In introducing Bishop Savva, the patriarch pointed out that he was a soldier before becoming a monk and priest. The patriarch added that he was convinced that the new bishop could benefit from the experience of the Episcopal Church's chaplaincy and learn from how its ministry is organized.

"We have much to learn," the patriarch said during the visit last summer. "You have proven in practice already that you are committed to help us.... In many ways, we are beginning from scratch. We must share with those churches which have a long experience."

The patriarch thanked Keyser and his party for the long-standing relationship between the two churches, giving special thanks to the social ministry which is now serving as a witness and model for the Orthodox as they attempt to reestablish their own ministries in the wake of the collapse of communism.

Bishops may visit troops in Bosnia

In response, Keyser brought greetings from Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and expressed his thanks for the consecration of Bishop Savva. He spoke of his hopes for their work together in the future. With Browning's approval and support, Keyser invited Savva and his staff to visit Episcopal military and prison chaplains in the United States and to accompany him on a visit to Russian and

American soldiers serving together on the peace-keeping mission in Bosnia. The patriarch endorsed the idea and agreed to support the trip to Bosnia.

Before the meeting with the patriarch, Keyser and representative chaplains from each branch in the American armed forces visited Savva at his residence and offices.

As a symbol of the Russian church's recovery of properties lost during the 1917 revolution, the offices are part of a compound long associated with the military. The Church of the Ascension and Our Lady of Jerusalem was built by a son of Peter the Great and originally served as the military church in Moscow. After the revolution, it was a warehouse, umbrella factory and most recently a computer center. The church is now being restored. The compound also houses an orphanage started by Bishop Savva.

"Fifteen years ago the world said that our nations were enemies," Keyser said during a luncheon at the church. "Today both Russian and American troops are deployed side by side for the cause of peace. We have the risen Christ to thank for these developments, for this time of celebration, for the love, joy and freedom which we know today."

--The Rev. William Noble is executive assistant to the Bishop for the Armed Forces and was a participant in the trip to Moscow.

96-1473

Browning joins in supporting Clinton's veto of "partial birth abortion" ban

by James H. Thrall

(ENS) Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning has joined other mainstream religious leaders in urging Congress not to override President Bill Clinton's veto of the so-called "partial birth abortion ban" that would outlaw a rare but controversial late-term abortion procedure.

The April 29 letter to members of Congress, sponsored by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, states that the signers "fully support the President's action in standing with women and their families who face tragic, untenable pregnancies."

The coalition includes offices and agencies of the Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, and United Church of Christ, as well as Reform and Conservative Jewish faith groups. The nearly 30 signers of the letter include the Rev. James Andrews, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Paul Sherry, president of the United Church of Christ, Thomas White Wolf Fassett, executive secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, and Rabbi Alex Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Support for President Clinton

The coalition also wrote to Clinton expressing its support of his veto. "We know that some religious leaders have criticized you for that veto based on their sincere religious beliefs that human life is sacred," the letter states. "You should know that we, too, hold human life sacred, yet we respectfully disagree with this legislation."

The legislation passed by Congress and vetoed by Clinton would outlaw the "intact dilation and extraction" method of abortion, referred to as "partial birth abortion" by abortion opponents. According to the coalition, the procedure is used rarely and most often for severely deformed fetuses. In cases of "severe fetal anomalies or threats to the life and health of the mother," the letters argue, "people of faith are called to cherish the life of the mother and others who are affected . . . and to have compassion for a fetus who, if born, would inevitably suffer or die."

A woman must be free to make such difficult moral decisions about late-term abortions "in consultation with her doctor, her family, and her God," the letter states. "Indeed, where religious people have such profound and sincere differences--even within our own denominations and faith groups--the government must not legislate,

and thus impose, one religious view on all our citizens," it continues.

In a 1994 resolution, General Convention, the chief legislative body of the Episcopal Church, noted that "all human life is sacred from its inception until death," and stressed that "we regard abortion as having a tragic dimension, calling for concern and compassion of all the Christian community." At the same time, the resolution expressed "unequivocal opposition to any legislative, executive, or judicial action . . . that abridges the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy or that would limit the access of a woman to a safe means of acting on her decision."

--James H. Thrall is deputy director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1474

South African Truth Commission staggers under weight of horrifying testimony

by James Solheim

(ENS) As the parade of witnesses told their harrowing stories of torture and death to the opening sessions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu bowed his head and wept openly. Staggering under the weight of the testimony, he was not even able to adjourn the session. He and other commission members received counseling to help them cope with the accounts emerging from the dark period of apartheid.

Yet observers said that the first week of hearings was marked by the absence of any bitterness or calls for revenge. Witnesses wanted facts, to know who was responsible for the abuses and what had happened to friends and family who disappeared.

A teenager whose politically active father was murdered, told the commission, "We want to forgive--but we don't know whom to forgive." Several witnesses said that forgiveness would be possible only if the guilty came forward, confessed their guilt and repented.

Reasons for hope

"Few of us can be the same again," Tutu said after one round of testimonies. In response to a white Afrikaner who lost an eight-year-old son in an attack by

soldiers of the African National Congress (ANC), the archbishop said, "The reason why we still hope that reconciliation will triumph is because of people like you."

Tutu told another witness, "You are an example of why we are going to make it in this country. The reason why we won the struggle was not because of guns, but because we had people like you--people of incredible strength. Thank you for sacrificing your husbands."

The 82-year-old mother of an ANC activist killed by South African security forces asked the commission to help her buy a tombstone for her son. Another asked the commission to help her find the remains of her husband so that she could give him a proper burial. She also wanted help to further her education, and that of her young son.

Although the commission has been appointed for 18 months, the enormity of the task has led to suggestions that it be given a more permanent status. In addition to the current hearings that seek to uncover "the truth," other commission hearings must deal with the issue of amnesty and with reparation.

--James Solheim is director of news and information for the Episcopal Church. Ecumenical News International contributed to this report.

96-1475

Conference in Dallas addresses issues of the church as workplace

by Herb Gunn

(ENS) A butcher, a baker, a candle-stick maker or a deacon, an organist or a secretary: What constitutes work in the Episcopal Church and how is it valued?

These questions highlighted a three-day conference on *Strengthening Working Relationships in the Church*, organized by the Professional Ministry Development Cluster of the Episcopal Church and held May 2-4 in Dallas, Texas.

Prompted by rising anxiety over job-related issues expressed by the National Network of Episcopal Clergy Associations (NNECA), the National Network of Lay Professionals (NNLP), and the North American Association for the Diaconate (NAAD), Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning issued a call for the meeting to assess how people who work for the church feel about their work.

Twenty-two persons in leadership roles from a variety of professional and

vocational associations throughout the Episcopal Church gathered to compare notes from the work experience of their members. The groups' wide diversity and a floodtide of vocational insecurities had the potential to override any common purpose. The result, however, was a spirit of remarkable unity and focus.

"Although this is our first meeting," said the Rev. Wayne Wright, past president of NNECA, in remarks at the closing Eucharist, "we have met each other and served each other all along." He recalled how he often relies on his bishop's secretary, that he met his wife at an Episcopal camp and that his child attends an Episcopal school.

The New Orleans cleric's sense of connection among those who are employed by the church was shared by others at the conference. And among them all, the reticence to join yet another association was overcome by the sense that this gathering was something special. Out of the conference was born a new professional association called the Colloquium of Episcopal Professional and Vocational Associations (CEPVA) which will continue to address the issues that face those who work for the church.

"This is something new and exciting that will be of great benefit to the church in the years to come," said the Rev. James Wilson of the Professional Ministry Development Cluster.

Justice for lay professionals

Highlighting the discussion throughout the conference were questions of economics, justice and professional development.

"Not any of these issues should be separated from the baptismal covenant," said Howard Ross of the NNLP. The church, added Thom Robertson of the Anglican Association of Musicians, "needs to recognize what we do as a ministry."

"What we are talking about is honoring the ministry of the lay person," added Beth Matthews, secretary to the bishop of Arkansas.

The Very Rev. Durstan McDonald, dean of the Seminary of the Southwest, urged some caution in the way in which the language is used to describe church work.

"Clergy, doctors and lawyers are professions in the old-fashioned sense of the term, but the language has shifted," he explained. "The baptismal covenant talks about going out, not work within the church.

"We should reserve the term lay ministry for whatever you do wherever you are," he continued. "It is the way in which you represent Christ in the broken world. . . . whereas, a lay profession is what you do within the church."

Some people do exercise their lay ministry within their church profession, he added, but the two are not necessarily the same.

Once a distinction is made, McDonald said, the church should seek to recognize the importance of lay professionals and work to insure structures

of support that are "parallel to clergy professional support."

Professional certification urged

Several conference participants suggested that some sort of professional certification would be helpful in establishing credibility for Episcopal lay professionals.

Wearing his hat as the national staff person for the Church Deployment Office, Wilson urged professional groups to encourage their members to register with the national deployment office, whether or not they might be presently searching for new employment. He explained that his office does *de facto* certify lay professionals when it verifies their eligibility with their respective diocesan bishops and maintains their employment files.

"Being registered may or may not have to do with whether you are looking for a new job," Wilson explained. "But it has to do with the stewardship of God's ministry."

Ruth Schmidt, the executive director of the NNLP and a member of the Council for the Development of Ministry, added that each diocese might also consider its own certification process.

Pro forma resignation assailed

The Dallas conference also focused on several issues of involuntary termination, including pro forma resignations, as well as general issues of severance pay and out-placement training and assistance.

"Arbitrary dismissal without cause, without review and without evaluation is wreaking havoc on families and lives within the church," said the Rev. Jack Andersen, of the Camp and Conference Centers. "How do we set up some norms and standards [to protect] one's dignity?"

"I would hope that there could be a system set up to make departures more just and dignified," added Howard Ross, who along with his NNLP affiliation is the director of music and organist at Church of the Transfiguration in Dallas and a member of the Anglican Association of Musicians.

While NNECA had been previously petitioned by NNLP to support its strong position against pro forma resignations, the clergy association had not met in their annual meeting to consider the statement. Other groups present at the conference, however, characterized pro forma resignations as archaic and unfair to diocesan or parish staff in place at the time of leadership transition.

Conference participants prepared a brief statement called *Principles of Justice and Accountability in the Church Workplace*, which outlined principles and practices of fair employment for lay and clergy in the Episcopal Church. The guidelines, which will reach the floor of General Convention next year, describe a

covenant relationship between the person called and the calling community.

Several participants suggested that employment practices that lacked clarity and consistency, and the inherent insecurities felt by those who worked under them, often indicated a need to improve the relationships surrounding employment. Employment practices that attempted to supplant the diligent work of improving relationships--such as pro forma terminations or infrequent mutual evaluations--were at the core of employee dissatisfaction.

While participants agreed that new policies and procedures would not eliminate the reality and the pain of people losing their jobs, they suggested that the church could communicate more clearly, create a more equitable policy on termination issues, and codify ways in which lay professionals and those in church vocations will be recognized and supported in their professional development and for their contributions.

We are talking about "strengthening Christian relationships," said Deacon Susanne Watson of the North American Association for the Diaconate. The group's emphasis, she said, should be on "speaking the truth in love, empowerment and enabling people with different ideas around the table."

New network of networks formed

By the end of the three-day conference, the groups represented identified an arena of continuing work for themselves and created a new network of networks called Colloquium of Episcopal Professional and Vocational Associations (CEPVA). Several of the groups are planning to develop a unified exhibit booth at General Convention and will lend their support to General Convention resolutions that raise employee issues.

"The booth will be a symbol," said Ruth Schmidt of the Council for the Development of Ministry and the NNLP. "Whether [displays will be] unified or adjoined, that will be an important symbol and a big step forward for those working as professionals in the church."

"The unity of these disparate groups manifesting itself at General Convention," said Ann Gordon of the National Association of Episcopal Schools, "could speak to a church that needs that kind of symbolism."

"It gives me hope for the church," concurred Bishop Earl McArthur, suffragan bishop of West Texas, representing the House of Bishops. "It will send a message to the church and the General Convention that it really needs to hear."

CEPVA is planning to reconvene for a second conference on Strengthening Working Relationship in the Church next April.

Joining NNECA, NNLP, and NAAD in the creation of a new league of professional associations were representatives from: Bishop's Executive Secretaries Together (BEST), the Anglican Association of Musicians (AAM), the National

Association of Episcopal Schools (NAES), Episcopal Camp and Conference Centers (ECCC), the Diocesan Deployment Officers (DDO), the Church Pension Group (CPG), the Assembly of Episcopal Hospitals and Chaplains (AEHC), the Conference on the Religious Life (CORL), the Council for the Development of Ministry (CDM), the Council of Seminary Deans, Episcopal Communicators and the House of Bishops.

--Herb Gunn is editor of the Record, the newspaper of the Diocese of Michigan, and represented Episcopal Communicators at the conference.



news briefs

96-1476

New Jersey dean resigns, faces lawsuit for sexual harassment

(ENS) Dean J. Chester Grey of Trinity Cathedral in the Diocese of New Jersey, who was facing a lawsuit alleging sexual harassment, resigned May 2. The suit was filed May 6 by a former employee who said that he was fired when he was not willing to provide sexual favors for the dean. Bishop Joe Morris Doss met with the cathedral congregation and told them that he believed Grey was innocent and that the diocese would stand with the former dean. The bishop said that Grey "had come to one of those defining moments in his life," and that he had dealt with "his feelings and identity" as a gay man. Doss said that Grey felt "a great burden has been lifted," and he added that "this is not a time for judging, it's a time for compassion, healing, sharing and support... an opportunity to continue the ministry he started only three years ago." The bishop appointed the Rev. Charles Cesaretti, who had been working as a part-time consultant to the diocese, to serve as vicar of the cathedral. The man filing the charges, who was offered housing by the dean in the wake of marital problems, said in his suit that the dean committed assault and battery through inappropriate physical contact while making graphic sexual comments. The suit alleges that the cathedral and diocese knew or should have known about Grey's improper conduct.

Sentencing of Ellen Cooke postponed to July 10

(ENS) The sentencing of Ellen Cooke, former national treasurer of the Episcopal Church who admitted embezzling more than \$1.5 million, has been postponed a second time to July 10, according to a spokesman for the United States District Attorney's office in Newark, New Jersey. The original date for the sentencing of April 29 was changed once before to May 29.

The spokesman said that it was office policy not to give a reason for schedule changes. At the time of Cooke's guilty plea, January 24, both the prosecution and defense reported plans to schedule psychiatric evaluations of Cooke before the sentencing hearing.

Defense attorney Plato Cacheris told Judge Maryanne Trump Barry at the time that Cooke suffered from a cyclothymic mental disorder that caused her to "black out" certain events in the past. Cooke told the judge she accepted responsibility for her actions, though she said she did not recall stealing the money.

In a process unrelated to the criminal charges facing Cooke, the Episcopal Church settled civil suits in March that it had brought against Cooke and her husband, Nicholas. Attorneys representing the church advised settling the suits, stating that the church had received the maximum possible restitution from the Cookes.

Video and teleconference will promote dialogue on sexuality

(ENS) The Episcopal Church's Committee on Continuing the Dialogue, established at the 1994 General Convention to design ways to extend the church's discussion of sexuality, has granted \$5,000 to launch a video and teleconference. "The committee felt that it would be helpful to have such a documentary to generate discussion and also to identify issues that are sometimes difficult to talk about without the aid of such a resource," said Bishop Craig Anderson of the General Theological Seminary who chairs the committee. Cameron Dubes of New York, who is executive producer of the project called "For Christ's Sake," said that a documentary would tell the story of 12 people from diverse backgrounds. "As we follow characters we identify with and hear more personally from those we oppose, we will gain greater understanding of the sources of these conflicting views and see greater prospects for communication, compromise and reconciliation where we had only imagined greater conflict, distrust and despair," said Dr. James Ault, who will serve as producer and director. The video is designed for use at the parish and diocesan level, although its quality and format would be suitable for cable television outlets. Additional funds are being sought for the \$175,000 video, with a goal of \$400,000 for the video and the teleconference.

Former archbishop of Canterbury ordained homosexuals

(ENS) Lord Robert Runcie, former archbishop of Canterbury, admitted during an interview on BBC Radio that he had ordained non-celibate homosexuals but added that he had not "knowingly ordained anyone who told me they were a practicing homosexual and were living in partnership with somebody as if it was a marriage." Runcie dismissed as "ludicrous" a compromise statement from the Church of England's House of Bishops which says "officially the line is that nobody can be ordained who engages in genital sexual activity and yet you can be a member of the church if you do." He said that he "never liked the prospect of inquiring into what happened in a man's bedroom unless he was prepared to tell me."

Former bishop of Minnesota honored by Catholic university

(ENS) Bishop Robert Anderson, former bishop of the Diocese of Minnesota, was honored by St. John's University in Collegeville for "distinguished contributions to religion and society. The citation on the award, named for former St. John's president Colman Barry, said that Anderson has been "driven by a prudent vision and ardent passion for the spiritual renewal of Christian communities." It cited his role in establishing the Episcopal House of Prayer at St. John's. "In this unique endeavor--the first Anglican prayer center established on the grounds of a Roman Catholic monastery--you gave co-religionists and others a sacred place to rediscover more than 450 years of firm roots in Anglican Benedictine worship and prayer, to receive spiritual direction and to grow spiritually."

English and German churches grapple with role of bishops

(ENI) The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Church of England reached a historic agreement in 1988, recognizing each other as churches with valid ministries and sacraments but now they are grappling with the unresolved issue of the role of bishops. The English church has retained the "historic episcopate," based on a continuity in the ordination of bishops back to the early church, while the EKD's 24 Lutheran, United and Reformed churches do not include a similar sign of unity. "The Germans, who are not short on logic and rationality, could not hear overall that we thought the historic episcopate was of the essence of the church and put up a very firm response to any suggestion that we might," said Bishop Colin Buchanan after a meeting that failed to resolve the issue. Unlike the Lutheran and Anglican churches of northern Europe who have signed a new agreement for inter-communion, the EKD churches do not have an episcopal form of governance. Buchanan suggested that the Anglicans might have to bend the rules a bit to allow EKD ministers to preside at their services.

Orthodox churches heal rift over Estonian church

(ENI) The Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia is once again praying for Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I of Constantinople after reaching an agreement May 16 on who has jurisdiction over the Orthodox Church in the Baltic state of Estonia. A joint statement said that, "using extreme dispensation, they will allow the Estonian Orthodox the freedom to choose to which ecclesiastical jurisdiction they wish to belong." The Orthodox faced a potential break in communion and, for the first time in centuries, Alexy deleted the Ecumenical Patriarch from formal prayers in the Russian church, accusing him of intervening in its "canonical territory." The situation was complicated by the fact that many Estonians want nothing to do with Russians, who annexed their country in 1940. The Estonian government registered the church with connections to the Ecumenical Patriarch, opening the possibility that parishes linked to Moscow might lose church property

under a law of restitution. The compromise commits the patriarchs to "work together to jointly present their position to the Estonian government, so that all the Estonian Orthodox might enjoy the same rights, including the right to own property."

Anglican archbishop in Africa blasts foreign aid agencies

(ENI) Anglican Archbishop Walter Makhulu of Central Africa has criticized some international donor agencies for being "neo-colonialist" and power hungry at the expense of poor developing countries whose raw materials have been exploited. He told a conference in Botswana that rich, developed countries were "vying for a place in the sun at all costs," ignoring the effect on developing nations. "Development is not about the cuddling of sweethearts, it is the drama of power, where those who are still looking for control want to find new means and ways," he said. The present world order was characterized by "plunder, exploitation and war-displaced persons," often caused by the heavy debt burden carried by the sub-Saharan countries. He urged financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to cancel the debts owed by African countries, calling for an "integrated and people-centered approach to development."

World Council team reports on visit to churches in China

(WCC) A World Council of Churches delegation returned from an extensive 11-day visit to China to observe the implementation of the 1994 decrees of the government on religion. "We have encountered a vital, rapidly growing Christian church in all the provinces visited," said the Rev. Dwain Epps, the WCC's international affairs coordinator. "Church-state relations were positive, overall, but with important and troubling exceptions," he added. The report said that religion continues to be subject to strict regulation and that there have been abuses of power in religious matters on the local level. It also noted that the churches continue to face a shortage of qualified clergy and lay leaders in the face of rapid growth and transition. The church struggles to be "truly Chinese" and maintain a prophetic tradition, while the government focuses on social stability at a time of rapid economic development. While foreign missionary activity is officially prohibited, it continues clandestinely in some areas, creating tensions between church and state authorities.

Russian parliament won't ban missionary work of foreigners

(ENI) Attempts by the Russian Orthodox Church to ban missionary work of foreigners has been rejected by a key committee of the State Duma, the lower chamber of the parliament. The Moscow Patriarchate sought to ban missionary work unless it had been cleared with the Russian Orthodox Church and was willing to work within guidelines set by the church. The government did agree to require foreign

religious organizations to register with the state. If the law is passed, groups would submit their "charter or other basic document," certified by their own governments. And they would include a description of their religious teaching and practice and a statement of intent. Under current law there are very few restrictions.

Uniting Church in Australia rethinking gay clergy

(ENS) The Uniting Church in Australia has issued the draft of a report that opens the possibility of gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex relationships. "The task group has found no evidence that a person who is homosexual is less fit for ministry or that a homosexual minister damages the credibility of ministry more than anyone else," said the report. "To continue to postpone our full acceptance of lesbian women and gay men within the church is unjust." The draft will be considered by clergy and committees throughout the church before going to the national assembly in 1997.

Church assembly site poses risk to homosexuals, WCC told

(ENI) The World Council of Churches (WCC) should change its plans to hold its next world assembly in Harare because "any person suspected of being homosexual" will be at risk in the Zimbabwean capital, according to a recent statement from the Common Global Ministries Board (CGMB)--a joint agency set up by the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. CGMB has publicly called on the WCC to relocate the 1998 assembly because of the risk to homosexuals and because the views of the Zimbabwe president conflict with the human rights policies of the two churches. A spokesman for the WCC said that the ecumenical group had been assured by the Harare government that participants at the assembly in September 1998 would have freedom of speech and of entry into the country. CGMB noted however that Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe had "made several public attacks on Zimbabwean gays and lesbians," calling them "worse than dogs and pigs." According to CGMB, "such state-sponsored attacks could provoke acts of violence toward any person suspected of being homosexual, without reference to due process of law."

'Voluntary celibacy' next century, predicts Irish bishop

(ENI) The Roman Catholic Church will introduce voluntary celibacy for its priests, but only well into the next century, according to a recent prediction by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Killaloe in Ireland, Willie Walsh. Walsh told an Irish magazine, *The Banner*, that he believed celibacy was something which served the early church well. However, he said that recent scandals in Ireland, in which clergy had fathered children and had been involved in the sexual abuse of children, have

created doubt over the issue. "By being celibate we risk being isolated and being emotionally detached and less than fully in touch with marriage and the struggles of married people," Walsh said. "Equally, being celibate has given many priests the opportunity to get close to a small number of families. . . . I have the feeling that we will come to the point of having some sort of voluntary celibacy. Ultimately we will come to that, but I think that will be well into the next century." He said that he took seriously his promise at ordination to be loyal to the Pope and to the teachings of the church. "But I have grave difficulty with the idea that any subject is not open to discussion," he added.

'De-anglicize' Anglicanism, says Francophone Anglican leader

(ENI) Anglicanism will find acceptance among many people in the world's French-speaking areas if it can be de-anglicized, according to Jacques P. Bossiere, the president of a new association of Francophone Anglican churches. He said that Anglicanism originated as a communion provincial in its English expression "but carrying values which have a universal character." Anglicanism originated in the break (1532 - 1534) between King Henry VIII of England and Pope Clement VII, after which the English Parliament declared Henry to be the "supreme head on earth of the English Church." To some people, an Anglicanism "de-anglicized" might appear to be a contradiction, but not to Bossiere. The genius of Anglicanism lies in the "comprehensiveness" that enables it to hold together such divergent approaches as "high church" and "low church" in a way that Roman Catholicism cannot, he said. Bossiere was recently elected president of an executive committee representing French-speaking Anglican churches. The committee includes representatives from Zaire, Rwanda, Guinea, Mauritius, Seychelles, Haiti, Quebec and France, as well as the United States. They represent some two or three million members world-wide, he said.

Computerized Cranmer gives boost to prayer book battle

(ENI) Visions of the faithful filing into church pews clutching laptop computers have been stirred by the recent launch on computer disk of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. The reality behind the launch by the Prayer Book Society (PBS) and software specialists Churchill Systems is more prosaic. Worshippers may leave their computers at home because the electronic prayer book package allows vicars to generate customized leaflets with lessons, psalms and hymns for the day. Anthony Kilmister, chairman of the traditionalist PBS, in fact, stresses the virtues of the prayer book held comfortably under the arm. "It's no part of our thinking to sound the death knell of the printed form," he said. With the spreading practice of leaflets in the pews for individual services--and an estimated half of Church of England parishes possessing computers--Kilmister is keen not to be out of

the race. The society battles to maintain the 1662 Book of Common Prayer--derived from the original 16th century Anglican texts of Thomas Cranmer--against the more widely used Alternative Service Book and other modern versions. For Kilmister and colleagues such as vice-chairman Neil Inkley, whose idea it was to put the prayer book into CD-Rom and floppy disk formats, being traditional can include being wired. "We want to tool up the parishes," said Kilmister. "We see Cranmer leaping electronically into the 21st century."

US Methodists reaffirm ban on 'promoting' homosexuality

(ENI) A strenuous effort to soften the position against homosexuality of one of the biggest Protestant churches in the United States failed recently when delegates to the United Methodist Church's general conference refused to approve "holy unions", same-sex "covenants" or any other marriage-like ceremonies for homosexuals. Delegates also rejected a proposal to end a ban on church funding of any organization that "promotes" homosexuality. The day before, delegates voted to maintain the denomination's position that homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching." In doing so, they went against the legislative committee that narrowly--45 to 43--recommended a change to say the church was "unable to arrive at a common mind." However, the vote revealed a shift in denominational sentiment since the 1992 general conference, when the vote for keeping the "incompatible" language was 710 to 238.

US Methodists vote to join the Church of Christ Uniting

(ENS) In a two third majority vote, the United Methodist General Conference recently indicated that it will enter the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU). According to Daniel Hamby, general secretary of the Consultation on Church Union, the United Methodist Church is the first of the COCU communions which not only adopted the theological basis and proposal to enter COCU, but also took necessary action to amend their constitution to make provision for participating in COCU covenanting councils. "This is the sixth positive response COCU has received since the voting process began," Hamby said. "The United Methodist Church has moved us to the place where it is difficult not to imagine that the Church of Christ Uniting will become a reality very soon."

Canadian church supports ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation

(ENS) Archdeacon Jim Boyles, general secretary of the Anglican Church in Canada (ACC), recently wrote to Canadian federal Justice Minister Alan Rock in support of the proposed legislation to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Boyles cited a 1979 statement of principle by the National House of Bishops of the ACC which declared that "we affirm that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection under the law with all other Canadian citizens." He also cited a resolution passed by the General Synod of the ACC in 1995 which affirmed "the presence of gay men and lesbians in the life of the church and [condemned] bigotry, violence and hatred directed toward any due to their sexual orientation." "Given these statements of our church," Boyle concluded, "I would like to encourage your government in its endeavor to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation on the protected list."

Catholic-Lutheran agreement seen on justification by faith

(ENS) The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Coordinating Committee which met to review the proposed "Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith" recently predicted that a forthcoming joint declaration by the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Lutheran World Federation will express agreement on those issues considered church-dividing on the topic of justification by faith, the doctrinal matter that was at the center of the Reformation controversies. The committee's report on the proposed joint declaration will go to the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and to the Lutheran World Federation. The declaration will be a common statement of faith by the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Lutheran World Federation.

Trinity grants program seeks 'spiritually vital' congregations

(ENS) The Grants Board of Trinity Church, Wall Street, recently launched an effort to enhance and encourage spiritual formation and vitality in Episcopal parishes across the nation. The project will combine the evaluation of a church-wide request for proposals with a Hartford Seminary study of Episcopal congregations to establish a benchmark for what is working at the grassroots level. In January, the board allocated approximately \$400,000 to support programs in Episcopal parishes that foster spiritual formation and development. The program plans to make up to ten grants this year to Episcopal parishes with programs that have a track record of reaching spiritual seekers and that could benefit from expansion.

Episcopal media producers form roundtable

(ENS) Episcopalians working in electronic media formed the Episcopal Media Producer's Roundtable (EMPR) at a recent meeting in Atlanta. The participants adopted a mission statement that EMPR be a "creative and practical collaboration to increase opportunities and resources to produce and use electronic media within and beyond the Episcopal Church." The Rev. Canon Louis C. Schuëddig, director of the Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, and the Rev. Clement Lee, director of Electronic Media at the Episcopal Church Center, invited video producers and multi-media professionals to the meeting to discuss cooperation and shared resources in media production and use. "Whatever we can do together is better than what we can do alone," Schuëddig said.

First woman to head American Bible Society trustees

(ENS) A Presbyterian churchwoman who was the first non-Episcopalian and the first laywoman to become a canon in the Episcopal Church recently scored another first: the first woman to head the board of one of the nation's largest non-profit Bible publishers. Mrs. Sally Shoemaker Robinson, a former Presbyterian missionary who was appointed canon in the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland in 1985, became chairperson of the American Bible Society Board of Trustees during the closing session of the organization's annual meeting, replacing James Wood from that position. "I think this is an enormous honor," Robinson said. "I would not even consider this if the organization was not so amazingly strong and Jim [Wood] had not been such a good leader."

Bishop reacts to Tasmanian tragedy

(ENS) Bishop Phillip Newell of Tasmania described the recent shooting of more than thirty people at Port Arthur as "one of the darkest days in the history of our state." Newell said that "for those of us who are Christians, our hearts go out in love and prayers for the many grieving families and communities affected. We need to remember the police, emergency services, doctors, nurses, counsellors and chaplains--the whole team who have responded so magnificently and who themselves will be part of the trauma. They are passing through the valley of deepest shadow. We want to pray with them, to grieve, to cry with them tonight." Newell has arranged for additional chaplaincy and counselling services to be available, coordinated by the Senior Chaplain at the Royal Hobart Hospital. A special service is to be held in the Cathedral to enable the community to express its grief and its love for those caught up in "this day of despair."

Correction: In the article "Episcopal tour of Dominican Republic highlights church's plans for growth" by Nan Cobbey (#96-1448 in the April 19, 1996 issue of ENS), the tin-roofed church on the sugar plantation in Gautier, Dominican Republic, was built with the help of funds from the Church of St. James of Oneonta, New York, according to Bob Stevens, an appointed missionary who was misidentified as a Volunteer for Mission in the story.



news features

96-1477

Diocesan ecumenical officers discuss proposals for full communion with Lutherans

by James Solheim

(ENS) As the Episcopal Church prepares to decide next summer on full communion with the Lutherans, the church's top ecumenical officer told his colleagues at their annual meeting that "the Spirit is moving in some surprising and profound ways."

Calling the Concordat of Agreement between Episcopalians and Lutherans "one of the most important decisions our church has faced for years," the Rev. David Perry told the Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (EDEO) that he is "excited and enthused" by the "growing and healthy interest" in the proposals at all levels in the church. EDEO met in the context of a National Workshop on Christian Unity in Richmond, Virginia, May 6-9.

Among the signs he shared with participants were studies of the proposals among seminarians, wider distribution of study resources in the dioceses, and joint meetings of clergy and even delegates to the conventions of both churches that will make the decision next summer.

"We face an unprecedented moment in the history of the ecumenical movement in the United States," Dr. Darlis Swan, ecumenical officer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), said during a plenary discussion of a variety of ecumenical proposals. The ELCA will act on a similar proposal with several Reformed churches and a possible joint declaration with the Roman Catholics on the issue of justification.

In comparing the different proposals, Dr. Michael Root of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, asked whether "these new relationships lead to renewal throughout these churches." He contended that, as the proposals move forward, "our churches will become a laboratory for testing the convergence on unity that we have achieved." Only by living out the proposals "will we be able accurately

to gauge how far we have come on our pilgrimage--and how far we still have to go. Communion is a lived reality and life itself will need to test the proposals if they are adopted."

An intricate web

Speaking from a European context, Dr. Mary Tanner of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity said that the proposals "mark a new and very hopeful phase" in the wider ecumenical movement. Yet she warned against easy comparisons between the European and American proposals because of differences in size and diversity, as well as cultural and political factors.

The ecumenical proposals, Tanner observed, are part of "an intricate web of Christianity around the world," parts of a similar story. "The full communion you seek is bound to that wider unity and belonging" and "should challenge our narrow parochialism" at all levels.

Tanner expressed reservations over what she perceived as attempts to "justify parallel ecclesiastical structures" as churches seek a common life. "Shouldn't we risk the unfolding, blossoming of new structures to challenge denominationalism?" she asked. She pointed to what she called "a costly unity of giving up part of our identity," suggesting that Europeans seem more realistic about seeing ecumenical agreements as steps on the way to unity.

European agreement of Anglicans and Lutherans

Tanner reported on the acceptance of a "Common Statement" among 12 Anglican and Lutheran churches in northern Europe for their own unique ecumenical cooperation. In the face of a resurgence of nationalism in Europe, with its "dangerous and divisive" undercurrents, agreement is based on what she called "common consciousness of mission and ministry."

The agreement, named for the Finnish city where it was signed, addresses missionary challenges in a reordered Europe. "The missionary dimension infuses the whole statement," Tanner said. "Strong common structures are essential" to a common ministry, she added, and representative councils will meet every two years to shape that mission.

No Cuisinart ecumenism

After tracing 30 years of dialogue that led to the Concordat, Dean William Peterson of Bexley Hall in Rochester, New York, said that "Lutherans are being asked to do some remarkable things--and many of them are concerned about losing their identity."

Speaking to a joint meeting of Episcopal and Lutheran ecumenical officers, Peterson dismissed allegations that the proposals represent a kind of "Cuisinart

ecumenism." He said that the Concordat calls for "a whole new relationship between churches, a shared intent to mission at all levels." Both churches will be "risking something new for the sake of the Gospel."

"Full communion offers us a different possibility," added Prof. Walter Bouman of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. He and Peterson have been speaking about the Concordat with groups throughout both churches.

Bouman pointed out that the "impasse on ministry proved more difficult than we had imagined," with Episcopalians insisting on the historic episcopate as a non-negotiable component of communion with other churches. The impasse was broken when the third dialogue found a way based on a common understanding of "apostolicity" as a way of authenticating the ministry of both churches. Lutherans will gradually adopt the historic episcopate as bishops of both churches jointly consecrate all bishops in the future. "The presence of bishops is an act of communion with each other," Bouman said. "The Concordat would be a catalyst for our structures to be signs of unity and community."

--James Solheim is director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1478

Church leaders investigate firebombings of black churches across the South

by Nan Cobbey

(ENS) As the van pulled off the dirt road, the sun cast long shadows over what remained of Central Baptist Church: charred timbers, blackened blocks, twisted metal. Only the brick chimney stood.

Around the lot's perimeter, tucked among primroses and crimson clover, lay silent witnesses to the destruction: five generations of the congregation's ancestors, their graves marked by modest headstones.

Central Baptist in Massillon is one of dozens of black churches mysteriously burned in the last few years, and an ecumenical team had come to investigate and offer support.

In the midst of the rubble lay a bell. "It had been here as long as I was," the Rev. David Alexander said as he and the others looked over the wreckage. "And I've been here 72 years."

"We lost a whole lot in the fire ... everything we had." The insurance, he

said, was "old," and the \$10,000 or \$15,000 the church might receive will not go far.

That story of senseless destruction, repeated again and again by other pastors in other towns, has convinced a National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) task force that they are witnessing not only a vicious form of domestic terrorism, but evidence of a conspiracy.

Forty-nine churches across the South have been burned since 1990 and the incidents are occurring with rapidly increasing frequency. In 1994, 10 churches burned. In 1995, 13. This year so far, 14 more.

NCC task force looks for answers

Diane Porter, the Episcopal Church's senior executive for program, serves with the Rev. Mac Charles Jones, the NCC's associate to the general secretary for racial justice, as co-chair of a coalition task force investigating the fires. She led a team traveling to Southern states to meet with pastors and members of the affected churches.

The investigating team is beginning to see similarities between the fires, "something that looks like an initiation rite for white young men going into a supremacist organization," said Porter, a black woman. "The work we are doing now is going to focus on whether or not that is the emerging pattern."

The team is a coalition of people from the NCC's racial justice working group, the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR), which tracks the Ku Klux Klan and other supremacist organizations, and the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York. It has interviewed dozens of pastors and church members across the South and visited five states where burnings have occurred--Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia.

An hour and a half south in Greene County, where three churches were burned in January, the team heard how black community leaders were excluded from meetings with the U.S. assistant attorney general for civil rights, Deval Patrick, when he came to investigate the burnings. A newly formed, predominantly white citizens committee that is controlling donations for the burned churches met with Patrick.

The pastors of Mount Zion, Little Zion and Mount Zoar Baptist churches shared discouragement about their treatment. They resent being asked to beg for money sent to help them. "I've been in that church 82 years ... behind that rostrum 79 years. If they got no more confidence in me than that, they can keep the money," said the Rev. W.D. Lewis, 92, pastor of Little Zion Baptist.

A desire for answers and action

Though they offer support, solidarity and help with fund-raising to rebuild the churches, the coalition's goals are far broader. Porter and the others want to focus national attention on escalating hate crimes and what they see as an entirely

inadequate response. They want answers and they want action.

One way they hope to encourage that is by bringing the pastors of the burned churches to Washington, D.C., June 8-10, for a National Day of Justice for Black Churches. They want the pastors to tell their stories to each other and the press, to worship together at an ecumenical service and, finally, to meet with officials of the Justice Department including, they hope, Attorney General Janet Reno.

"I want the Justice Department to take this seriously," said Porter. "I want them to stop and say, 'Well maybe this *is* domestic terrorism. Maybe racism *is* behind this. Maybe there *is* something more to all this than meets the eye.'"

Her frustration emerges from what team members heard again and again during their visits:

- * Local investigators refuse to believe race is involved in the burnings even when three or more churches, all of them black, are destroyed in the same area.

- * Investigations do not lead to arrests but focus instead on the pastors and congregations of the victimized churches and disrupt their lives.

- * Predominantly white citizens' groups take control of donations sent to rebuild the churches and then make black pastors submit requests and receipts to get the money, implying they can't be trusted.

The coalition's criticism of federal handling of the investigations may be behind its exclusion from giving oral testimony at recent Congressional hearings. While the Christian Coalition and Southern Baptist Convention were invited to participate, the three groups were told the witness list was full and were limited to sending in written testimony.

"It seems to me to be an obvious snub," said Jones. "I think it was a political decision because it would have been pretty hard to miss us."

"We submit to this committee that these manifestations of domestic terrorism demand the highest degree of bi-partisan attention at the federal, state and local levels," stated the written testimony offered by the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, NCC general secretary, and Bishop Melvin Talbert, NCC president. "This is not a Democratic or Republican issue, but rather an American problem that should arouse moral outrage and condemnation from all people irrespective of their race, ethnic origin, religious affiliation or political orientation."

Hate crimes against churches on the rise

Before the 1990s, according to a study conducted by USA Today, no more than one such fire a year was reported. Since 1990, 49 black or multiracial churches, most of them Baptist, have been burned.

Burnings are not the only hate crime churches are reporting. Pastors have received death threats. Congregations complain of racist graffiti, cross burnings, hate literature and vandalism, some of it severe.

In most cases, local FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents are handling the investigations. Yet in the last six years only 12 suspects have been arrested. All of them are white males between the ages of 17 and 42, and a number belong to white-supremacist organizations including Aryan Nation, Skinheads for White Justice and the Klan, according to CDR research.

Until last month, all the fire-bombings reported had taken place in nine southern states. On April 19, Riverview Missionary Baptist Church in Kingston, New York, was set on fire. A resident in the church's black neighborhood saw two white men watching the church just before the flames were visible. Investigators say a flammable liquid was used.

Why is this happening?

"These church burnings are not *just* church burnings," declared team member Ron Daniels at a rally April 7. Daniels, executive director of the Center for Democratic Renewal, was addressing a crowd of several hundred at First Baptist Church in East Elmhurst, New York.

"[The burnings are] really an attack on affirmative action ... on immigrants ... on social programs. This is happening in the context of a nation where the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and where millions of poor white people are anxious, feeling great anxiety and pain."

Yet, he said, instead of getting angry at powerful whites who control the wealth, who "perpetuate a crime against all poor people," the anxious turn their anger "toward black people, people of color, the dispossessed and the disadvantaged."

In that kind of "venomous climate, people do crazy things," said Daniels. "Instead of standing side by side with black people to transform and change society ... [they] are turning their anger against black churches."

Challenge to the church

Jones has a warning for the churches and the nation. "Ultimately what we are talking about is the soul of America. I'm convinced that unless America deals with the issue of racism, America can never be a country that reaches its destiny."

Jones brought that message of challenge to the rally in East Elmhurst. He named the violence as a form of domestic terrorism, called it "an attack on the soul of the African-American community," and urged his listeners to cease being silent in the face of such racism.

"Call the sin by its name," he said. "Somebody has to name it. We as the church are called to the job of naming sin."

Then he reminded his fellow team members and the ecumenical, multiracial audience that they had the antidote to "this evil conspiracy." It had been given to them by the one who broke the bread and poured the wine to put himself inside them

and change them so they could not be still "when wrong was being done, black churches being burned."

"This antidote does not stop conspiracies," said Jones, "but it is so powerful and so strong that we will survive the conspiracy and the conspiracies will not have the last word. The conspiracies *do not* have the last word."

--Nan Cobbey is features editor of *Episcopal Life*, the national newspaper of the Episcopal Church.

96-1479

Rwanda horror lingers as Anglican Communion seeks to address long-term needs

by James H. Thrall

(ENS) The meeting room in New York City was thousands of miles from the tortured land of Rwanda where an estimated one million people died two years ago in ethnic genocide, yet the pain in Bishop David Birney's voice brought that horror very close.

"To be in a country where a Christian would take up arms against a brother and sister and bludgeon them to death . . . ," he said, shaking his head. "When day after day for one month you look into the eyes of orphans, the eyes of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of widows--who's going to take care of them?"

Birney, retired bishop of Idaho who most recently served as assistant bishop of Massachusetts, spent four weeks in February and March in Rwanda as the official representative of the archbishop of Canterbury. In the early 1970s, he served as a missionary to the region, and then was national coordinator of overseas ministries for the Episcopal Church and the presiding bishop's liaison to the Anglican provinces of Africa until 1982.

With Rob Shropshire, Africa officer with the Anglican Church of Canada's Primate's Fund for World Relief, Birney briefed church officials and representatives of the United Nations and other international agencies on the situation in Rwanda, at the Episcopal Church Center, May 7.

Hatred, anger and grief

As a teacher at Bishop Tucker College in Uganda, "I taught a lot of their clergy who have been murdered," Birney said of the Rwandan church. "It was

difficult to wrap my heart and my mind around what happened. I don't have any answers; I don't have many recommendations. The hatred, the anger, the grief there are so great."

The murderous divisions between Hutu and Tutsi tribes that were at the heart of the genocide, he said, were the creation of colonial powers who favored one group over the other. "These are people who share exactly the same language, exactly the same customs, they inter-married," he said. "These are people who belonged to each other--it's destroyed, it's gone."

While there are no easy answers, he said, "if there is one thing that I believe with all my being must happen, it is that before any effort at reconciliation can be made, there has got to be a means of getting a system of justice in place."

Even more immediate for the Anglican Communion, he said, a tribunal should be established to investigate allegations that church leaders, including Anglican bishops, were involved in the planning and execution of the genocide. Until those charges are either put to rest or proven, the church in Rwanda is essentially unable to function, he said.

Churches' failure to act

"I believe we must, *must* move ahead to indicate to the government there that the church is serious about getting its house in order," Birney said. "People there need to buy into it and say this is our making, this is our doing," agreed Shropshire. While the charges need to be assessed impartially, it is clear that the Anglican church, like many others, failed to act prophetically when the killing began. "No one bishop opened his mouth when the genocide was starting and being carried out," Birney said. "Not one cried out, 'Stop!'"

Birney has also recommended that the Anglican Communion support trauma teams from around the world who could in turn train local teams to help the population deal with its latent rage.

Visiting Rwanda's capital of Kigali is "quite surreal," said Shropshire. Most of the damage from the fighting has been repaired and fresh paint is much in evidence. "It's a lovely capital. Things look quite good," he said, until "you start scratching under the surface" and discover the wells of "barely concealed grief and animosity."

Another eruption possible

Shropshire said that the population of "quiet moderates, who at least don't want any more murders," seems to be getting "quieter and quieter" in the face of renewed extremism from both Hutus and Tutsis. "They are afraid to speak up and speak against it," he said.

Birney complained that international attention has moved on to other troubled regions when the needs in Rwanda continue to be great. "The world has just passed

them by," he said. With discontent continuing to brew in refugee camps in neighboring Burundi, and similar ethnic tensions affecting that country as well, the danger of another eruption of violence is high. Without concerted and ongoing intervention, he said, "five years down the road, ten years down the road, it's going to blow again."

--James H. Thrall is deputy director of news and information for the Episcopal Church.

96-1480

In search for clearer identity, Province of the Pacific votes to restructure

by Mary Parsons

(ENS) Faced with questions of mistrust, an unclear mission statement, and a \$50,000 shortfall in its budget, the 66th meeting of the Episcopal Church's Province VIII in Anchorage April 30-May 3 decided it was time to restructure.

The province encompasses the western third of the United States and stretches out into the Pacific Rim, embracing a wide cultural diversity--and producing some confusion over structure and mission.

An organizational audit conducted at the request of the province's executive committee uncovered a list of positive contributions by the province in areas of youth ministry, the Commission on Ministry Conference and the opportunities to network among the dioceses.

On the other hand, the survey revealed a lack of trust in the province, a communications gap between the provinces and member dioceses, and open questions about the direction and leadership of the province.

"Friends, we need each other desperately," Joyce McConnell, vice president of the province, told the delegates and guests. "We are going to be asked to take some risks in the future."

Those risks became more apparent when Bishop Robert Ladehoff of Oregon presented a "Plan to Renew the Province of the Pacific." With the help of a management consultant, an oversight committee developed a set of options for the current and future operation of the province.

A key provision of the "restructuring resolution" Ladehoff presented authorized a half-time executive director to serve from June 1 until February 28,

1997. The executive director and oversight committee will bring in specific recommendations for structural changes to a meeting early in 1997. In adopting the resolution, the province is eliminating the position of provincial secretary, closing offices in San Jose and San Francisco and asking the Rev. Thaddeus Bennett to serve as executive director. He has been a part-time consultant for the province.

Time to build the church

Bishop Richard Shimpfky of El Camino Real said that the plan for restructuring was presented as an offering to the delegates and to God. "I am simply sick to death of the whittling and the belittling going on in our church today," he said. "It's time to get on with building this church for our Christ and for the extension of his kingdom."

Shimpfky, who was reelected president of the province, said that the historic meeting represented a turning point. "We stepped forward and did some very strategic planning for the future," he said.

Calling attention to the conference theme, "Living the Future Now," Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning said in his sermon at the eucharist, "We are rooted in the past, but the past is not where we live." As the world faces a new millennium, he contended that "the soul of America is in serious danger....because of our very modern version of a very ancient sin--the sin of idolatry." He cited the idolatry of money and cultural uniformity as examples.

"Into the future we will go, ready or not," Browning concluded. "We will witness great change, and we will be agents of great change. New idols will appear and new versions of old ones.... Let us be good and intelligent stewards of all we have been given, and entrust the future, as we entrust the present, to God," he said.

--Mary Parsons is a member of the staff and edits the newspaper for the Diocese of Alaska.

Press Alert:

Executive Council to meet in Charlestown, West Virginia, June 10-13

The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church will meet at the Charleston Marriott Town Center in Charleston, West Virginia, June 10-13. If you are interested in covering the meeting, please contact the news office.

The council's standing committees on administration and finance, planning and evaluation, and program will meet on Monday, June 10, the opening day. The first plenary session for the council will begin at 9:15 a.m. on Tuesday, with opening remarks from Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and House of Deputies President Pamela Chinnis. The program committee will report to the full council Tuesday afternoon.

Plenary sessions continue Wednesday with planning and evaluation committee, and administration and finance committee reports. The evening will be devoted to a presentation on ministries of the Diocese of West Virginia.

On Thursday morning, among other business, the council will hear a report on the status of the Episcopal-Lutheran Concordat that would bring the two denominations into full communion. The meeting will adjourn at 6:30 p.m., following closing remarks from the presiding bishop.

A press conversation with Browning and Chinnis is tentatively scheduled for about 1:30 p.m., Thursday. For further information, contact James Thrall, deputy director of news and information.

Photos available in this issue of ENS:

1. Court for the trial of a bishop dismisses charges against Righter (96-1467)
2. Righter speaks at press conference following dismissal of charges (96-1467)
3. Bishop Righter ecclesial court case attracts media attention ((96-1467)
4. Diocese of Newark celebrates court's decision (96-1468)*
5. Episcopal Church and Russian Orthodox consult on military chaplaincy (96-1472)
6. Diocesan ecumenical officers discuss full communion with Lutherans (96-1477)
7. Episcopal Church joins in investigation of fires at black churches (96-1478)
8. Horrors of ethnic massacres continue to plague Rwanda (96-1479)

The tentative date for the next issue of ENS is June 20.

